CORNELIUS TACITUS

A DIALOGUE ON ORATORY

1. Dear Justus Fabius[1]—There is a question that you often put to me. How is it that, whereas former ages were so prolific of great orators, men of genius and renown, on our generation a signal blight has fallen: it lacks distinction in eloquence, and scarce retains so much as the name of "orator," which we apply exclusively to the men of olden time, calling good speakers of the present day "pleaders," "advocates," "counsel"—anything rather than "orators." To attempt an answer to your conundrum is to take up a difficult investigation, involving this grave dilemma: either it is want of ability that keeps us from rising to the same high standard, in which case we must think meanly of our powers, or it is want of will, and in that event we shall have to condemn our taste. Such an attempt I should really scarce presume to make, if it were my own views that I had to put forward, instead of reproducing a conversation between certain persons—very good speakers, according to our present-day standards—whom I listened to when quite a youth as they held high debate over this very issue. So it is not intellectual ability that I require, but only power of memory, in order now to recount the sagacious

thoughts and the weighty language which I heard from the lips of those eminent men, reproducing the same divisions and the same arguments. The explanations which they severally offered, though discrepant, had each something to recommend it, and in putting them forward the speaker reflected in every case his individual character. I shall adhere moreover to the order in which they actually argued. For the opposite point of view also found a champion in one who, roundly abusing the old order of things, and holding it up to ridicule, exalted the eloquence of our own times above the genius of the past.

2. It was the day following that on which Curiatius Maternus [1] had given a reading of his "Cato," [2] when court circles were said to have taken umbrage at the way in which he had thrown himself in the play heart and soul into the role of Cato, with never a thought of himself. The thing was the talk of the town, and Maternus had a call from Marcus Aper [3] and Julius Secundus,[4] then the leading lights of the bar at Rome. Of both of them I can say that—being passionately fond of rhetorical studies, and fired with youthful enthusiasm—I made a practice not only of listening attentively to their pleadings in court, but also of attaching myself to them at their homes and attending them out of doors. I wanted to drink in their casual talk as well, and their

[2] M. Porcius Cato the younger, opponent of Caesar, who committed suicide in 46 B.C. after defeat at Thapsus. A play about him naturally gave scope for sentiments that could offend an Emperor.

[3] Unknown outside the *Dialogus*.

[4] Friend and contemporary of Quintilian, who praised his elegant oratory (10.1.120; 12.10.11).

discussions, and the confidences of their esoteric discourse,[1] notwithstanding the many spiteful critics who held that Secundus was not a ready speaker, and that Aper's title to oratorical renown was based on ability and inborn talent rather than on any literary training. The fact is that Secundus was the master of a style that was idiomatic and precise and fluent enough for his purpose, while Aper was a man of all-round learning, who as regards literature was not so much ignorant as disdainful, believing that his industry and application would redound more to his credit if it were thought that his natural talents did not need the prop of any extraneous accomplishments.

3. Well, on entering Maternus's room we found him sitting with a book in front of him—the very same from which he had given his reading on the previous day; whereupon Secundus said, "Has the talk of your detractors no terrors for you, Maternus? Does it not make you feel less enamoured of that exasperating Cato of yours? Or is it with the idea of going carefully over it that you have taken your drama in hand, intending to cut out any passages that may have given a handle for misrepresentation, and then to publish your 'Cato,' if not better than it was at least not so dangerous?"

To this he rejoined, "The reading of it will show you what Maternus considered his duty to himself: you will find it just as you heard it read. Yes, and if 'Cato' has left anything unsaid, at my next reading it shall be supplied in my 'Thyestes';[2] for so I

the possibilities for "anti-dynastic rhetoric" (Syme, *Tacitus*, 110).

call the tragedy which I have already planned and of which I have the outline in my head. It is just because I want to get the first play off my hands and to throw myself whole-heartedly into my new theme that I am hurrying to get this work ready for publication."

"So then," said Aper, "you have not had enough of those tragedies of yours? Otherwise you would not turn your back on your profession of speaker and pleader, and spend your whole time on plays. The other day it was 'Medea,' and now it is 'Thyestes'; and all the while you are being summoned to the forum by the long list of your friends' cases, and the equally long list of colonies and country towns for which you ought to act. Why, you could hardly meet all those calls even if you had not so gratuitously shouldered this new occupation of lumping in with Greekling legends a Domitius [1] and a Cato, that is to say, stories from our own annals too, with Roman names."

4. "I should be greatly put out by your harsh words," said Maternus, "had not frequent and constant disputation become for us by now almost second nature. You on your part are never done assailing the poets with your invective, and I, whom you charge with neglect of professional duty, am daily retained to defend the art of poetry against you. This makes me all the more glad that we have here an arbitrator who will either forbid me to write verse in future, or will throw his influence into the scale to make me realise perforce a long-cherished dream, and forsaking the narrow sphere of pleading at the bar, which has taken too much out of me

already, cultivate eloquence in its higher and holier form."

5. "As for me," said Secundus, "before Aper declines to have me as an umpire, I shall follow the usual practice of upright and conscientious judges, who ask to be excused from acting in cases where it is obvious that one of the two parties stands higher in their good graces than the other. Everybody knows that no one is closer to me than Saleius Bassus,[1] an old friend with whom I have enjoyed continuous personal association. Not only is Bassus the best of men but he is also a really ideal poet. Indeed if poetry is to be put on her defence, I do not know where you will find a more credit-worthy respondent."

"Saleius Bassus may keep his mind at rest," Aper rejoined, "and so may everyone who, not being competent for the bar, sets his heart on the pursuit of poetry and on making himself famous by his verse. That the plea of being only one among many should be put forward in defence of Maternus is something that—now that I have found an arbitrator in this suit —I am not going to allow. No, I shall make him sole defendant, to answer before everyone to the charge that, though born to the sturdy kind of practical eloquence which would enable him to make friendships and preserve them, to form extended connections, and to take whole provinces under his wing, he turns his back on a profession than which you cannot imagine any in the whole country more productive of practical benefits, or that carries with it a sweeter sense of satisfaction, or that does more to enhance a man's personal standing, or that brings

more honour and renown here in Rome, or that secures a more brilliant reputation throughout the Empire and in the world at large.

"If practical advantage is to be the rule of all we think and all we do, can there be any safer line to take than the practice of an art which gives you an ever ready weapon with which to protect your friends, to succour those to whom you are a stranger, to bring deliverance to persons in jeopardy, and even to strike fear and terror into the hearts of malignant foes—while you yourself have no anxiety, entrenched as you are behind a rampart of inalienable authority and power? While things are going well with you, it is in the refuge it affords to others, and in the protection it gives them, that its efficacy and usefulness are most in evidence; but when danger hurtles round your own head, then surely no sword or buckler in the press of arms gives stouter support than does eloquence to him who is imperilled by a prosecution; for it is a sure defence and a weapon of attack withal, that enables you with equal ease to act on the defensive or to advance to the assault, whether in the law courts, or in the senate house, or in the Emperor's cabinet council. What was it save his eloquence that enabled Eprius Marcellus [1] a short while ago to confront the senate, with everyone against him? Ready for the fray and breathing defiance, he could parry the blows of the philosopher Helvidius,[2] who for all his clever speaking was, as regards that sort of contest, an inexperienced novice. I need say no more under the head of practical advantage, for here my friend Maternus is not at all likely, I take it, to join issue with me.

6. "I pass to the satisfaction which eloquence affords. It is not for a single instant only that its delights are ours, but almost every day of the week, nay almost every hour of the day. What greater gratification can there be for a free-born gentleman, fashioned by nature for lofty pleasures, than to see his house filled to the door every day with a company of persons of the highest rank, and to know that he owes this compliment not to his wealth, not to his being childless, not to the fact that he holds some office or other, but to himself? Why, people who have no one to leave their money to, and the rich and the great, are always coming to the barrister, young and poor though he may be, to get him to take up their own cases or those of their friends. Can vast wealth or great power bring with it any satisfaction comparable to the sight of grave and reverend seniors, men with the whole world at their feet, freely owning that, though in circumstances of the utmost affluence, they lack the greatest gift of all? Just look, again, at the imposing retinue of clients that follows you when you leave your house! What a brave show you make out of doors! What an amount of deference is paid to you in the law-courts! What a supreme delight it is to gather yourself to your feet, and to take your stand before a hushed audience, that has eyes only for you! Think of the growing crowd streaming round about the speaker, and taking on any mood in which he may care to wrap himself, as with a cloak. It is the notorious delights of speech-making that I am enumerating—those that are full in view even of the uninitiated; but there is far more in those that are not so obvious, and that

are known only to the orator himself. If he comes out with an elaborate oration which has been carefully rehearsed, his feeling of satisfaction, like the discourse itself, has about it something solid and abiding; if again he happens to produce—not without a feeling of nervousness—some brand new composition, his very anxiety deepens the impression produced and enhances the joy of success. But quite the most exquisite delight comes from speaking extempore, in bold fashion and even with a touch of daring; for the domain of intellect is like a piece of ground under tillage—though you find pleasure in what takes a long time to sow and cultivate, yet the growth that comes by nature is more pleasing still.

7. " Let me make this avowal about my own case. The day on which I was invested with the robe of a senator, or that on which I was elected quaestor, or tribune, or praetor, though a man of new birth and a native of a community which is not at all popular at Rome—such days have been in no greater degree red-letter days for me than those on which I enjoy the opportunity, to the modest extent of my poor ability as a speaker, of securing an acquittal in a criminal trial, or of pleading some case successfully before the centumviral court,[1] or of undertaking the defence of some redoubtable freedman or imperial agent in the Emperor's presence-chamber. Then it is that I feel I am rising above the level of a tribune, a praetor, or even a consul, and that I possess an asset which, unless it comes unbidden, cannot either be conferred by letters-patent or follow in the train of popular favour.

" Why, where is there a profession whose name and

fame are to be compared with renown in oratory? What class of men enjoys greater prestige here in Rome than our public speakers, in the eyes not only of busy men, engrossed in affairs, but also of younger persons and those who have not yet come to man's estate—provided always that they are of good natural disposition and have some outlook? Are there any whose names are dinned at an earlier age by parents into their children's ears? Are there any to whom the plain man in the street, our citizens in their working-clothes, more frequently point as they pass by, saying, 'There goes So-and-so'? Visitors also and non-residents, as soon as they set foot in the capital, ask for the men of whom in their country towns and colonies they have already heard so much, and are all agog to make them out.

8. "I would make bold to affirm that our friend Eprius Marcellus, of whom I have just been speaking, and Vibius Crispus [1] (I prefer to cite instances that are fresh and of recent date rather than those which are so far back as to be half-forgotten), are just as well known in the uttermost parts of the earth as they are at Capua or Vercellae,[2] which are mentioned as the places of their birth. And it is not their great wealth that they have to thank for this—200 millions of sesterces [3] in the one case and 300 in the other—though it would be possible to hold that it is to their eloquence that they owe that wealth: no, what makes them famous is simply their eloquence. In all ages the divine influence and supernatural power

[2] The former near Naples, the latter near Milan.

[3] Translation into modern terms is unhelpful; but these were vast sums. Contrast the modest gift to Bassus in 9.5.

of eloquence have given us many illustrations of the high position to which men have climbed by sheer intellectual capacity; but these are cases which, as I have said already, come home to us, and it has been vouchsafed us to see them with our own eyes instead of learning of them by hearsay. The meaner and the more humble was the origin of those two men, and the more notorious the poverty and want that hemmed in their young lives, so the more brightly do they shine as conspicuous examples of the practical advantage of oratorical power. Though they had none of the recommendations of birth or the resources of wealth, though neither of the two was of pre-eminently high moral character, while one of them had an exterior that made him even an object of derision, yet after being now for many years the most powerful men in Rome, and—so long as they cared for such success—leaders of the bar, they take today the leading place in the Emperor's circle of friends, and get their own way in everything. And by Vespasian[1] himself they are regarded with an affection that is not unmixed with deference; for our aged and venerable Emperor, who never shuts his eyes to facts, is well aware that while all the rest of his favourites owe their position to the advantages they have received from him—advantages which he finds it quite easy to amass for himself and to lavish on others—Marcellus and Crispus, on the other hand, have brought to the friendship that unites them to him an element which they never got from an Emperor and which is absolutely incommunicable. Alongside of these many great achievements, medallions and inscriptions and statues are of very

little account; and yet even these are not to be lightly regarded, any more than wealth and riches, which you will always find men more ready to denounce than to disdain.

"Such then are the honours and distinctions and resources which we find to repletion in the houses of those who from youth up have dedicated themselves to the practice of law and the profession of oratory.

9. "As for poetry and verse-making, to which Maternus is eager to devote the whole of his life—for that was the starting-point of this talk—they neither bring their author any higher standing nor do they advance his material interests; and the satisfaction they furnish is as short-lived as their fame is empty and profitless. Very likely you will not relish what I am saying, Maternus, or what I intend to state in the course of my argument; but I ask all the same, When an Agamemnon or a Jason talks well in one of your plays, who profits by that? Does anyone gain a verdict by it, and feel beholden to you accordingly, as he goes home? Take our friend Saleius, a first-rate poet, or—if that is a more complimentary designation—a most illustrious bard: does any one escort him to his house, or wait on him to pay his respects, or follow in his train? Why surely, if any of his friends or relatives gets into trouble, or even himself, he will hie him to you, Secundus, or to you, Maternus—not because you are a poet, or with any idea of getting you to write verses in his defence: Bassus has his own home supply of these, and pretty, charming verses they are, though the upshot of them all is that, when he has concocted after long lucubration a single volume in a whole

year, working every day and most nights as well, he finds himself obliged to run round into the bargain and beg people to be kind enough to come and form an audience. That too costs him something, for he has to get the loan of a house, to fit up a recitation-hall, to hire chairs, and to distribute programmes. And even supposing his reading is a superlative success, in a day or two all the glory of it passes away, like a plant culled too soon in the blade or the bud, without reaching any real solid fruitage: what he gets out of it is never a friend, never a client, never any lasting gratitude for a service rendered, but only fitful applause, empty compliments, and a satisfaction that is fleeting. We were full of praise the other day for Vespasian's generosity in presenting Bassus with five hundred thousand sesterces, regarding it as striking and extraordinary. And to win for oneself by one's ability the favour of an Emperor is, no doubt, a fine thing; but how much finer is it, if the low state of one's fortune should make it necessary, to pay court to oneself instead, to be one's own good genius, and to make trial of one's own bounty? And there is more. A poet, when he is minded laboriously to produce some creditable composition, has to turn his back on the society of friends and on all the charms of city life; abandoning every other function, he must retire into the solitude, as poets themselves say, of the woods and the groves.[1]

10. "Nor is it even the case that a great name and fame, which is the only object they strive for, protesting that it is the one reward of all their toil, falls to the lot of poets as much as of orators: average poets no one knows, and good poets but few. Why,

take your public readings, few and far between as they are: when do they get noised abroad throughout the capital, to say nothing of coming to be known in the various provinces? How very seldom it is that, when a stranger arrives in Rome from Spain or Asia Minor, not to mention my own native land of Gaul, he makes inquiry after Saleius Bassus! And if anyone does happen to ask for him, when once he has clapped eyes on the poet, he passes on his way, quite satisfied—just as if it had been a picture or a statue that he had seen. Now I do not want you to take what I am saying as though I am trying to frighten away from verse composition those who are constitutionally devoid of oratorical talent, if they really can find agreeable entertainment for their spare time in this branch of literature, and gain for themselves a niche in the temple of fame. My belief is that there is something sacred and august about every form and every department of literary expression: I am of the opinion that it is not only your tragic buskin or the sonorous epic that we ought to exalt above the pursuit of non-literary accomplishments, but the charm of lyric poetry as well, and the wanton elegy, the biting iambic, the playful epigram, and in fact all the other forms in which eloquence finds utterance. My quarrel is with you, Maternus, and it is this: though your natural gifts point upwards to the true pinnacle of eloquence, you prefer to wander in bypaths, and when you could easily reach the top you loiter over comparatively trivial pursuits. If you had been a Greek, a native of a country where it is quite respectable to practise the arts that serve only for pastime,

and if heaven had given you the great bodily strength of a Nicostratus,[1] I should protest against allowing your brawny arms, framed for combats in the arena, to be thrown away on the tame sport of hurling the javelin or the discus; and in the same way now I am trying to get you away from the lecture-hall and the stage to the forum and to the real contests of actions-at-law. And all the more since you cannot shelter yourself behind the plea which helps out so many, namely, that people are less likely to take umbrage at the professional activity of the poet than at that of the public speaker. Why, your generous temperament is up in a blaze at once, and it is not in defence of a friend that you make yourself objectionable, but, what is more dangerous, in defence of Cato. And the offence you give cannot be held excused by the obligation to render a friendly service, or by loyalty to a client, or by the excitement of an unpremeditated utterance, made off-hand; no, it looks as if of set purpose you had selected a notorious personality, whose words would have great weight. I know what can be said on the other side: it is this that excites unbounded applause, it is this that in the recitation-room promptly secures great commendation and afterwards becomes the theme of universal remark. Away then with the plea that what you want is peace and quietness, seeing that you deliberately choose an adversary who is so much above you. For us orators let it suffice to play our parts in private and present-day controversies, and if in these it is at times incumbent, in defence of a friend who is in jeopardy, to say what is displeasing to the powers that be, may we win com-

mendation for our loyalty and indulgence for our outspokenness."

11. Aper's words were, as usual with him, somewhat vehement in their tone, and his face was hard set. When he had finished, Maternus replied blandly, and with a quiet smile: "I was getting ready to make my impeachment of the orators as thoroughgoing as Aper's eulogy had been; for my expectation was that he would turn from that eulogy to disparage poets and lay the pursuit of poesy in the dust. But he quite cleverly disarmed me by yielding the point that verse composition may be indulged in by anyone who would not make a good lawyer. Now while I might possibly accomplish something, though not without effort, as a barrister, yet on the other hand it was by dramatic readings that I took the first step on the path of fame, when in Nero's reign I broke the power of Vatinius,[1] that unconscionable usurper who was desecrating even the sanctity of letters; and any reputation or renown I may possess today is due, I fancy, to the fame of my poetry rather than to my speeches. And now I have determined to throw off the yoke of my practice at the bar. The retinue that attends you when you go out of doors and the crowd of morning callers have no charms for me, any more than the bronze medallions which even against my will have forced their way into my house. Everyone finds in uprightness a readier protection than in eloquence for his personal standing and peace of mind; and I am not afraid of ever having to address the senate except in the interests of someone else who is in jeopardy.

12. " As for the woods and the groves and the idea of a quiet life, which came in for such abuse from Aper, so great is the joy they bring me that I count it among the chief advantages of poetry that it is not written amid the bustle of the city, with clients sitting in wait for you at your own front door, or in association with accused persons, shabbily dressed and with tearful faces: no, the poetic soul withdraws into the habitations of purity and innocence, and in these hallowed dwellings finds its delight. Here is the cradle of eloquence, here its holy of holies; this was the form and fashion in which the faculty of utterance first won its way with mortal men, streaming into hearts that were as yet pure and free from any stain of guilt; poetry was the language of the oracles. The gain-getting rhetoric now in vogue, greedy for human blood, is a modern invention, the product of a depraved condition of society. As you said yourself, Aper, it has been devised for use as a weapon of offence. The age of bliss, on the other hand, the golden age, as we poets call it, knew nothing of either accusers or accusations; but it had a rich crop of poets and bards to chant the praises of those that did well rather than defend the evil-doer. And to none was greater fame or more exalted rank accorded than to them, first in high heaven itself; for they were the prophets, it was said, of the oracles of the gods, and were present as guests at their banquets; and thereafter at the courts of god-born holy kings, in whose company we never hear of a pleader, but of an Orpheus, a Linus,[1] and, if you care to go further back, Apollo himself. If you think there is too much legend and fiction about all this, you surely

will admit, Aper, that Homer has been revered by after ages just as much as Demosthenes, and that the fame of Euripides or Sophocles is not confined to narrower limits than that of Lysias or Hyperides.[1] And today you will find a larger number of critics ready to disparage Cicero's reputation than Virgil's; while there is no published oration of Asinius [2] or Messalla [3] so celebrated as the 'Medea' [4] of Ovid or the 'Thyestes' of Varius.[5]

13. "Nor should I hesitate to contrast the poet's lot in life and his delightful literary companionships with the unrest and anxiety that mark the orator's career. Even though in his case a consulship be the crown of all the contests and lawsuits he so dearly loves: for my part I would rather have the seclusion in which Virgil lived, tranquil and serene, without forfeiting either the favour of the sainted Augustus, or popularity with the citizens of Rome. This is vouched for by the letters of Augustus, and by the behaviour of the citizens themselves; for on hearing a quotation from Virgil in the course of a theatrical performance, they rose to their feet as one man, and did homage to the poet, who happened to be present at the play, just as they would have done to the Emperor himself. And in our own day too Pomponius Secundus [6] ranks just as high as Domitius Afer,[7] alike in personal standing and in enduring reputation.

[6] P. Pomponius Secundus (consul suffectus 44), the "consular poet" whose life was written by the elder Pliny: tragedian and scholar.

[7] Cn. Domitius Afer (consul suffectus 39), orator and wit, highly praised by his friend Quintilian (10.1.118), but less admired by Tacitus, who criticises his activities as a *delator* (*Ann.* 4.66).

As for your Crispus and your Marcellus, whom you hold up to me as patterns for imitation, what is there about their boasted condition that we ought to covet? Is it the fear they feel, or the fear they inspire in others? Is it the fact that, besieged as they are from day to day by all sorts of petitions, they set the backs up of those whom they are unable to oblige? Or that, being constrained to curry favour in every direction, they can never show themselves either sufficiently servile to the powers that be, or sufficiently independent to us? And what does this great power of theirs amount to? Why, the Emperor's freedmen often possess as much. As for myself, may the 'sweet Muses,' as Virgil says, bear *Geor.* me away to their holy places where sacred streams *475* do flow, beyond the reach of anxiety and care, and free from the obligation of performing each day some task that goes against the grain. May I no longer have anything to do with the mad racket and the hazards of the forum, or tremble as I try a fall with white-faced Fame. I do not want to be roused from sleep by the clatter of morning callers or by some breathless messenger from the palace; I do not care to have to write safeguards into my will in my anxiety as to what will happen;[1] I wish for no larger estate than I can leave to the heir of my own free choice; for 'some day or other the last hour will strike also for me.'[2] And my prayer is that my effigy may be set up beside my grave, not grim and scowling, but all smiles and garlands, and that no one shall seek to honour my memory either by a motion in the senate or by a petition to the Emperor."

14. Scarce had Maternus finished, speaking with

animation and in a sort of ecstasy, when Vipstanus Messala [1] entered the room; and divining from the look of fixed attention on each and every face that the subject of their conversation was one of special importance, he said: "Have I come in at the wrong moment, disturbing a private consultation, in which you are busy with the preparation of some case or other?"

"Not at all," exclaimed Secundus, "not at all: on the contrary, I wish you had come in sooner. You would have been delighted with our friend Aper's carefully elaborated discourse, which was an appeal to Maternus to devote all his talent and energy to pleading at the bar, and also with Maternus's enthusiastic vindication of his verses in a speech which, quite appropriately for one who was championing the poets, was somewhat daring and more in the style of poetry than of oratory."

"Why, surely," he rejoined, "I should have enjoyed the talk immensely; but what delights me is the very fact that distinguished persons like yourselves, the foremost speakers of the present day, do not confine your intellectual exercises to legal issues and the practice of declamation, but undertake in addition discussions of this sort, which strengthen the intellect and furnish at the same time, both to yourselves who take part in the debate and also to those to whose ears it comes, the most delightful entertainment that literary culture affords. As the author of a biography of Julius Africanus,[2] you, Secundus, have made the public hope for many more volumes of the kind, and I find that for this people are just as well pleased with you as they are with

Aper for not having yet withdrawn from the rhetorical exercises of the schools, and for choosing to spend all his leisure after the fashion of the new rhetoricians rather than of the orators of former days."

15. "My dear Messalla," Aper rejoined, "you are never done admiring what is old and out of date, and that alone, while you keep pouring ridicule and scorn on the culture of the present day. I have often heard you speak as you are speaking now—maintaining, with never a thought of how eloquent you are yourself, or how eloquent your brother [1] is, that we have no orator with us today who can hold his own with those of former times; and all the more daringly, I feel sure, because you did not need to be afraid of any imputation of petty jealousy, seeing that you were denying to yourself the reputation that others say is justly yours."

"Well," said Messalla, "I make no apologies for the sort of talk you say you have heard from me, and what is more, I don't really believe that Secundus or Maternus has any different opinion, or you either, Aper, though at times you argue in support of the opposite view. I only wish I could induce some one of your number to investigate the reasons for the prodigious contrast that there is, and to report the results of his investigation. I find myself often asking what they can be. And what brings comfort to some is to me only an aggravation of the difficulty, namely, the knowledge that the same thing happened also in Greece. Take your friend Sacerdos Nicetes,[2] for instance, and all the rest that make the walls of Ephesus or Mytilene shake with rounds of applause from their approving pupils: the interval

that separates them from Aeschines and Demosthenes is a wider one than that by which Afer or Africanus or you yourselves stand removed from Cicero or Asinius."

16. "It is an important issue," Secundus said, "that you have mooted, and one well worth discussion. But is there anyone who could more properly unfold it than yourself, seeing that to profound scholarship and eminent ability you have added much careful study?"

Messalla replied: "If I can first get you to promise that you too will lend me a helping hand with my discourse, I shall be glad to let you know what I think."

"I undertake for two of us," said Maternus; "both Secundus and I will take up the points, whatever they may be, which you do not so much overlook as deliberately leave to us. As to Aper, you said a little while ago that he has the habit of opposition; and moreover it is quite clear that for some time past he has been girding himself for the fray, and that our unanimous eulogy of the ancients is more than he can tamely endure."

"Certainly," Aper rejoined: "you are in collusion, and I will not allow judgement to go by default, and without a hearing, against our own times. But to begin with, I shall ask this question: who is it that you call the 'ancients,' and what period of oratory do you designate by your use of the word? For myself, when I hear people speaking of the 'ancients,' I take it that they are referring to persons remote from us, who lived long ago: I have in my mind's eye heroes like Ulysses and Nestor, whose

epoch antedates our own times by about thirteen hundred years. You on the other hand bring forward Demosthenes and Hyperides, whose date is well authenticated. They flourished in the days of Philip and Alexander, and indeed survived both these princes.[1] This makes it plain that between our era and that of Demosthenes there is an interval of not much more than three hundred years: a period which may perhaps seem long if measured by the standard of our feeble frames, but which, if considered in relation to the process of the ages and the endless lapse of time, is altogether short and but as yesterday. For if, as Cicero tells us in his 'Hortensius,'[2] the Great Year, the True Year, is that in which the constellations in the heavens above us come back again to the same position in which they are at any particular moment, and if the Great Year includes 12,954 of our so-called years, then it follows that your boasted Demosthenes, whom you make out to be an ancient, one of the olden times, must have lived not only in the same year as ourselves, but also in the same month.

17. "But I pass on to the orators of Rome. Among them it is not Menenius Agrippa,[3] I take it—who may well be considered an ancient—that you are in the habit of rating above good speakers of the present day, but Cicero, and Caesar, and Caelius, and Calvus, and Brutus,[4] and Asinius, and Messalla; though in regard to these I fail to see any reason why you should credit them to antiquity rather than to our own era. Just take Cicero: it was, as you know,

[4] For the last three, see below, 21.

in the consulship of Hirtius and Pansa [1] that he was put to death, on the 7th December, as his freedman Tiro has left it on record, in the year in which the sainted Augustus appointed himself along with Quintus Pedius to take the place of Hirtius and Pansa. Count the fifty-six years in which the sainted Augustus thereafter held the helm of state; to these add twenty-three years for Tiberius, nearly four for Caligula, fourteen each for Claudius and Nero, that one long year for Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and now the sixth stage of this auspicious reign in which Vespasian is making the country happy: [2] the addition gives us only a hundred and twenty years [3] from the death of Cicero to the present day, no more than the life of an individual. Why, I saw with my own eyes an old man in Britain who could make the statement that he had taken a hand in the fight in which, when Caesar was attempting the invasion of that island, his compatriots tried to head him off and repel him from their shores.[4] Now if the person who thus offered armed resistance to Caesar had come all the way to Rome as a slave, or on a visit, or by some other chance, it is quite possible that he might have listened to Caesar himself on the one hand, and to Cicero, and on the other have been present at our own judicial pleadings. You yourselves anyhow at the last public distribution of largess saw quite a number of old men who told us that they had more than once received a gratuity from the sainted Augustus himself. The obvious inference from this is that they might have listened to Corvinus as well as to Asinius, for Corvinus lived to the middle of the reign of Augustus, Asinius almost to the end of it; [5] so

that you must not make two epochs out of one, and keep on speaking of ' remote antiquity ' in reference to orators whom the same persons could have heard with their own ears and so have connected closely with ourselves.

18. " The reason why I have said all this by way of introduction is that I wanted to show that we have a common property in any lustre the name and fame of these orators may shed upon the times, and that it is nearer to us than to Servius Galba,[1] or Gaius Carbo,[2] and all the rest who may properly be called ' ancients '; for they are really rough and unfinished, crude and inartistic, and generally with such qualities that one could wish that neither your admired Calvus, nor Caelius, nor Cicero himself had made them his model in anything. I want to take a bolder line now, and to speak more resolutely, first premising however that the forms and types of oratory change with the times. Thus Gaius Gracchus,[3] as compared with old Cato,[4] has greater fullness and wealth of diction, Crassus [5] is more highly finished and more ornate than Gracchus, while Cicero is more luminous, more refined, more impassioned than either the one or the other. Corvinus again is mellower than Cicero, more engaging, and more careful in his choice of words. I am not asking which is the greatest orator: for my present purpose it is enough for me to have made the point that eloquence has more than one fashion of countenance, and that even in those whom you speak of as ' ancients ' a variety of types can be discovered. Where change occurs, we

of the generation before Cicero, whose views he is represented as championing in the *De Oratore*.

are not immediately to conclude that it is a change for the worse: you must blame it on the carping spirit of mankind that whereas what is old is always held in high esteem, anything modern gets the cold shoulder. We do not doubt, do we, that there have been those who admired Appius Caecus [1] more than Cato? Cicero himself, as is well known, had his detractors: they thought him turgid and puffy, wanting in conciseness, inordinately exuberant and redundant—in short, not Attic [2] enough. You have read, of course, the letters of Calvus and Brutus to Cicero, from which it is easy to gather that, as for Calvus, Cicero thought him bloodless and attenuated, just as he thought Brutus spiritless and disjointed; while Cicero was in his turn criticised by Calvus as flabby and pithless, and by Brutus, to use his own expression, as 'feeble and emasculate.' If you ask me, I think they all spoke the truth; but I shall deal with them individually later on; at present I am considering them as a class.

19. "The common practice of the eulogists of antiquity is to make this the line of demarcation between the ancients and ourselves. Down to the time of Cassius [3] . . . Now as to Cassius, who is the object of their attack, and who according to them was the first to turn away from the straight old path of eloquence, my argument is that it was not from

varied than his opponents thought. The correspondence of Calvus and Brutus with Cicero on these topics is lost.

[3] Cassius Severus, Augustan orator finally banished for the virulence of his views. Quintilian thought he lacked "gravity" (10.1.116). The lacuna after this word will presumably have contained some elaboration of the antique virtues from which Cassius strayed.

defective ability or want of literary culture that he went in for that style of rhetoric, but as the result of sound judgement and clear discrimination. He saw that with altered conditions and a variation in the popular taste, as I was saying a little while ago, the form and appearance of oratory had also to undergo a change. The public in those olden days, being untrained and unsophisticated, was quite well pleased with long-winded and involved orations, and would even bless the man who would fill up the day for them with his harangues. Just consider the lengthy exordia, designed to work upon the feelings of the audience, and the narrative portion, starting from the beginning of all things, and the parade of countless heads in the arrangement, and the thousand and one stages of the proof, and all the other precepts that are laid down in the dry-as-dust treatises of Hermagoras and Apollodorus [1]—all these were held in high esteem; and on the other hand, when there was anyone who was credited with having some slight smattering of philosophy, and who could slip some stock passage into his oration, he was praised to the skies. And no wonder. All that sort of thing was new and unfamiliar, and very few even of the orators themselves had made acquaintance with the rules of the rhetoricians or the tenets of the philosophers. But now that everything has become common property, and at a time when there is hardly any casual auditor in the well of the court who, if he has not had a systematic training in the rudiments of the art, cannot show at least a tincture of it, what we need is novel and choice methods of eloquence, by employing which the speaker may avoid boring his hearers,

especially when addressing a court which decides issues, not according to the letter of the law, but by virtue of its own inherent authority, not allowing the speaker to take his own time, but telling him how long he may have, and not waiting patiently for him to come to the point, but often going so far as to give him a warning, or call him back from a digression, and protest that it has no time to spare.

20. "Would anyone today put up with a speaker who begins by referring to his own poor health—the usual sort of introduction with Corvinus? Would anyone sit out the five orations against Verres?[1] Would anyone endure the interminable arguments about pleas and procedure which we get in the speeches delivered in defence of M. Tullius or Aulus Caecina?[2] Nowadays your judge travels faster than counsel, and if he cannot find something to engage his interest and prejudice him in your favour in a good-going proof, or in piquant utterances, or in brilliant and highly wrought pen-pictures, he is against you. The general audience, too, and the casual listeners who flock in and out, have come now to insist on a flowery and ornamental style of speaking; they will no more put up with sober, unadorned old-fashionedness in a court of law than if you were to try to reproduce on the stage the gestures of Roscius or Ambivius Turpio.[3] Yes, and our young men, still at the malleable stage of their education, who hang round our public speakers in order to improve themselves, are eager not only to hear but also to take home with them some striking and memorable

Turpio produced all Terence's plays in the early second century B.C.

utterance; they pass it on from mouth to mouth, and often quote it in their home correspondence with country towns and provinces, whether it be the flash of an epigram embodying some conceit in pointed and terse phraseology, or the glamour of some passage of choice poetical beauty. For the adornment of the poet is demanded nowadays also in the orator, an adornment not disfigured by the mouldiness of Accius or Pacuvius,[1] but fresh from the sacred shrine of a Horace, a Virgil, a Lucan. It is by accommodating itself to the taste and judgement of hearers such as these that the orators of the present day have gained in grace and attractiveness. And the fact that they please the ear does not make our speeches any the less telling in a court of law. Why, one might as well believe that temples are not so strongly built today because they are not put together out of coarse uncut stone and ugly-looking bricks, but glitter in marble and are all agleam with gold.

21. "I make the frank avowal that with some of the 'ancients' I can scarcely keep from laughing, while with others I can scarcely keep awake. And I am not going to name anyone belonging to the rank and file, a Canutius or an Attius, not to mention Furnius and Toranius,[2] and the others who, being inmates of the same infirmary, have nothing but approval for the familiar skin and bones: Calvus[3] himself, in spite of the fact that he left behind him as many, if I am right, as one-and-twenty volumes, hardly comes up to standard in any one of his addresses, or two at the most. And I do not find that the world at large dissents from this criticism. How

very few there are who read his impeachment of Asitius or Drusus! On the other hand, the orations entitled 'Against Vatinius'[1] are a common text-book with students, especially the second: for it is rich in style as well as in ideas, and well suited to the taste of a law court, so that one may readily see that Calvus himself knew the better part, and that his comparative lack of elevation and elegance was due not so much to want of taste as to want of intellectual force. Take, again, the speeches of Caelius:[2] surely those give satisfaction, either in whole or in part, in which we find the polish and elevation of style that are characteristic of the present day. For the rest, his commonplace phraseology, his slipshod arrangement, and his ill-constructed periods savour of old-fashionedness, and I do not believe that there is anyone so devoted to antiquity as to praise Caelius just because he is old-fashioned. As to Julius Caesar we must no doubt make allowance. It was owing to his vast designs and all-absorbing activities that he accomplished less as an orator than his superhuman genius called for; just as in the case of Brutus[3] we must leave him to his well-loved philosophy, for even his admirers admit that as an orator he did not rise to his reputation. You won't tell me that anybody reads Caesar's oration in defence of Decius the Samnite, or Brutus's in defence of King Deiotarus,[4] or any of the other speeches, all equally slow and equally flat—unless, indeed, it be someone who is an

Quintilian (10.1.123) agreed that his philosophy was superior to his ("Attic"?) oratory.

[4] Of Galatia, adherent of Pompey the Great; he was unsuccessfully defended by Brutus in Caesar's presence in 47 B.C.

admirer also of their poetry. For they not only wrote poetry, but what is more they sent copies to the libraries. Their verse is no better than Cicero's, but they have had more luck: it is not so notorious. Asinius too, though he is nearer to our own time, must have pursued his studies, as it seems to me, in the company of people like Menenius and Appius: at all events he modelled himself upon Pacuvius and Accius in his speeches as well as in his tragedies: so stiff is he, and so dry. No, it is with eloquence as with the human frame. There can be no beauty of form where the veins are prominent, or where one can count the bones: sound healthful blood must fill out the limbs, and riot over the muscles, concealing the sinews in turn under a ruddy complexion and a graceful exterior. I don't want to make an attack on Corvinus, as it was not his fault that he did not exhibit the luxuriance and the polish of the present day: indeed, we know how poorly supported his critical faculty was by imagination or intellectual power.

22. "I come now to Cicero, who had the same battle to fight with his contemporaries that I have with you. While they admired the ancients, he gave the preference to the eloquence of his own day; and it is in taste more than anything else that he outdistances the orators of his period. Cicero was the first to give its proper finish to oratorical style. He was the first to adopt a method of selection in the use of words, and to cultivate artistic arrangement; further, he tried his hand at flowery passages, and was the author of some pointed sayings, at any rate in the speeches which he wrote when well on in years

and towards the close of his career, that is to say, when his powers were well developed, and he had learned by experience and practice the qualities of the best type of oratory. As to his earlier speeches, they are not free from the old-fashioned blemishes. He is tedious in his introductions, long-winded in the narrative parts, and wearisome in his digressions. He is slow to rouse himself, and seldom warms to his work; only here and there do you find a sentence that has a rhythmical cadence and a flash-point at the finish. There is nothing you can extract, nothing you can take away with you: it is just as in rough-and-ready construction work, where the walls are strong, in all conscience, and lasting, but lacking in polish and lustre. My own view is that the orator, like a prosperous and well-found householder, ought to live in a house that is not only wind and weather proof, but pleasing also to the eye; he should not only have such furnishings as shall suffice for his essential needs, but also number among his belongings both gold and precious stones, so as to make people want to take him up again and again, and gaze with admiration. Some things there are again that must be carefully avoided, as antiquated and musty. There should be never a word of the rusty, mouldy tinge, never a sentence put together in the lame and listless style of the chroniclers. The orator ought to avoid discreditable and senseless buffoonery, vary his arrangement, and refrain from giving the self-same cadence to all his period-endings.

23. "I don't want to make fun of Cicero's 'Wheel of Fortune,'[1] and his 'Boar's Sauce,'[2] and the tag

esse videatur,[1] which he tacks on as a pointless finish for every second sentence throughout his speeches. It has gone against the grain to say what I have said, and there is more that I have left out: though it is precisely these blemishes, and these alone, that are admired and imitated by those who call themselves orators of the good old school. I mention no names, as it is enough for me to indicate a type; but you of course will have in your mind's eye the archaists who prefer Lucilius [2] to Horace, and Lucretius to Virgil, who consider the style of Aufidius Bassus and Servilius Nonianus [3] very inferior as compared with that of Sisenna [4] or Varro,[5] who, while they admire the draft speeches which Calvus left behind him, have nothing but feelings of disdain and repugnance for those of our own contemporaries. Such persons as these, when they prose along before a judge in the antique style, cannot hold the attention of their audience; the crowd refuses to listen, and even their clients can scarcely put up with them. So dreary are they and so uncouth: and even the sound condition which they make their boast they owe not to any sturdiness, but to banting. Why, in dealing with the human body, doctors have not much to say in praise of the patient who only keeps well by worrying about his health. It is not enough not to be ill; I like a man to be strong and hearty and vigorous. If soundness is all you can commend in him, he is really next door to an invalid.

" Do you, my eloquent friends, continue—as you are so well able to do—to shed lustre on this age of

[5] M. Terentius Varro, polymath and contemporary of Cicero.

ours by your noble oratory. You, Messalla, on the one hand, model your style, as I know, on all that is richest in the eloquence of former days; while as for you, Maternus and Secundus, you have such a happy combination of deep thinking with beauty and elegance of expression, you show such taste in the selection and arrangement of your subject-matter, such copiousness where necessary, such brevity where possible, such grace of construction, such perspicuity of thought, so well do you give expression to deep emotion, so restrained are you in your outspokenness, that even if spite and ill-will interfere with a favourable verdict from us who are your contemporaries, posterity assuredly will do you justice."

24. "There is no mistaking, is there," said Maternus, when Aper had finished speaking, "our friend's passionate impetuosity? With what a flow of words, with what a rush of eloquence, did he champion the age in which we live! With what readiness and versatility did he make war upon the ancients! What natural ability and inspiration, and more than that, what learning and skill did he display, borrowing from their own armoury the very weapons which he was afterwards to turn against themselves! All the same, Messalla, he must not be allowed to make you break your promise. It is not a defence of antiquity that we need, and in spite of the compliments Aper has just been paying us, there is no one among us whom we would set alongside of those who have been the object of his attack. He does not think there is, any more than we do. No; adopting an old method and one much in vogue with Roman philosophers, what he did was to take on himself the

role of an opponent. Well then, do you set before us, not a eulogy of the ancients (their renown is their best eulogy), but the reasons why we have fallen so far short of their eloquence, and that though chronology has proved to demonstration that from the death of Cicero to the present time is an interval of only one hundred and twenty years."

25. Thereupon Messalla spoke as follows : "I shall keep to the lines you have laid down, Maternus; Aper's argument does not need any lengthy refutation. He began by raising an objection which hinges, as it seems to me, on a mere name. Aper thinks it incorrect to apply the term 'ancients' to persons who are known to have lived only one hundred years ago. Now I am not going to fight about a word; he may call them 'ancients' or 'ancestors,' or anything else he likes, so long as it is admitted that the eloquence of those days stood higher than ours. No more have I any objection to another part of his argument: I agree that not only at different but at the same epochs more types of eloquence than one have made their appearance. But just as in Attic oratory the palm is awarded to Demosthenes, while next in order comes Aeschines, Hyperides, Lysias, and Lycurgus, and yet this era of eloquence is by universal consent considered as a whole the best; so at Rome it was Cicero who outdistanced the other speakers of his own day, while Calvus and Asinius and Caesar and Caelius and Brutus are rightly classed both above their predecessors and above those who came after them. In the face of this generic agreement it is unimportant that there are special points of difference. Calvus is more

concise, Asinius more vigorous, Caesar more stately, Caelius more pungent, Brutus more dignified, Cicero more impassioned, fuller, and more forceful; yet they all exhibit the same healthfulness of style, to such an extent that if you take up all their speeches at the same time you will find that, in spite of diversity of talent, there is a certain family likeness in taste and aspiration. As to their mutual recriminations—and there do occur in their correspondence some passages that reveal the bad blood there was between them—that is to be charged against them not as orators, but as human beings. With Calvus and Asinius—yes, and with Cicero himself—it was quite usual, I take it, to harbour feelings of jealousy and spite; they were liable to all the failings that mark our poor human nature. To my thinking Brutus is the only one of them who showed no rancour and no ill-will: in straightforward and ingenuous fashion he spoke out what was in his mind. Was it likely that Brutus would have any ill-will for Cicero? Why, he does not seem to me to have felt any for Julius Caesar himself. As to Servius Galba and Gaius Laelius,[1] and any of the other 'ancients,' speaking comparatively, whom Aper so persistently disparaged, their case does not call for any defence; I am free to admit that their style of eloquence had the defects that are incidental to infancy and immaturity.

26. "If, however, one had to choose a style without taking that supreme and perfect form of eloquence into account, I should certainly prefer the fiery spirit of Gaius Gracchus or the mellowness of

[1] Consul 140 B.C., and a member of the Scipionic circle.

Lucius Crassus to the coxcombry of a Maecenas [1] or the jingle-jangle of a Gallio; [2] for it is undoubtedly better to clothe what you have to say even in rough homespun than to parade it in the gay-coloured garb of a courtesan. There is a fashion much in vogue with quite a number of counsel nowadays that ill befits an orator, and is indeed scarce worthy even of a man. They make it their aim, by wantonness of language, by shallow-pated conceits, and by irregular arrangement, to produce the rhythms of stage-dancing; and whereas they ought to be ashamed even to have such a thing said by others, many of them actually boast that their speeches can be sung and danced to, as though that were something creditable, distinguished, and clever. This is the origin of the epigram, so shameful and so wrong-headed but yet so common, which says that at Rome 'orators speak voluptuously and actors dance eloquently.' With reference to Cassius Severus, who is the only one our friend Aper ventured to name, I should not care to deny that, if he is compared with those who came after him, he may be called a real orator, though a considerable portion of his compositions contains more of the choleric element than of good red blood. Cassius was the first to treat lightly the arrangement of his material, and to disregard propriety and restraint of utterance. He is unskilful in the use of the weapons of his choice, and so keen is he to hit that he quite frequently loses his balance. So, instead of being a warrior, he is simply a brawler. As already stated, however, compared with those

[2] L. Iunius Gallio, friend of the elder Seneca and of Ovid, declaimer and writer on rhetoric.

who came after him, he is far ahead of them in all-round learning, in the charm of his wit, and in sheer strength and pith. Aper could not prevail on himself to name any of those successors of Cassius, and to bring them into the firing-line. My expectation, on the other hand, was that after censuring Asinius and Caelius and Calvus, he would bring along another squad, and would name a greater or at least an equal number from whom we might pit one against Cicero, another against Caesar, and so, champion against champion, throughout the list. Instead of this he has restricted himself to a criticism of certain stated orators among the 'ancients,' without venturing to commend any of their successors, except in the most general terms. He was afraid, I fancy, of giving offence to many by specifying only a few. Why, almost all our professional rhetoricians plume themselves on their pet conviction that each of them is to be ranked as superior to Cicero, though distinctly inferior to Gabinianus.[1]

"I shall not hesitate, on the other hand, to name individuals in order to show, by the citation of instances, the successive stages in the decline and fall of eloquence."

27. Thereupon Maternus exclaimed: "Spare us that, and rather make good your promise. We do not want you to lead up to the conclusion that the ancients excelled us in eloquence. I regard that as an established fact. What we are asking for is the reasons of the decline. You said a little while ago that this forms a frequent subject of consideration with you: that was when you were in a distinctly milder frame of mind, and not so greatly incensed

against contemporary eloquence—in fact, before Aper gave you a shock by his attack on your ancestors." [1]

"My good friend Aper's discourse did not shock me," Messalla replied, "and no more must you be shocked by anything that may chance to grate upon your ears. You know that it is the rule in talks of this kind to speak out one's inmost convictions without prejudice to friendly feeling."

"Go on," said Maternus, "and in dealing with the men of olden times see that you avail yourself of all the old-fashioned outspokenness which we have fallen away from even more than we have from eloquence."

28. "My dear Maternus," Messalla continued, "the reasons you ask for are not far to seek. You know them yourself, and our good friends Secundus and Aper know them too, though you want me to take the role of the person who holds forth on views that are common to all of us. Everybody is aware that it is not for lack of votaries that eloquence and the other arts as well have fallen from their former high estate, but because of the laziness of our young men, the carelessness of parents, the ignorance of teachers, and the decay of the old-fashioned virtue. It was at Rome that this backsliding first began, but afterwards it permeated Italy and now it is making its way abroad. You know provincial conditions, however, better than I do; I am going to speak of the capital and of our home-grown Roman vices, which catch on to us as soon as we are born, and increase with each successive stage of our development. But first I must say a word or two about the rigorous

system which our forefathers followed in the matter of the upbringing and training of their children.

" In the good old days, every man's son, born in wedlock, was brought up not in the chamber of some hireling nurse, but in his mother's lap, and at her knee. And that mother could have no higher praise than that she managed the house and gave herself to her children. Again, some elderly relative would be selected in order that to her, as a person who had been tried and never found wanting, might be entrusted the care of all the youthful scions of the same house; in the presence of such an one no base word could be uttered without grave offence, and no wrong deed done. Religiously and with the utmost delicacy she regulated not only the serious tasks of her youthful charges, but their recreations also and their games. It was in this spirit, we are told, that Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi,[1] directed their upbringing, Aurelia that of Caesar, Atia of Augustus: thus it was that these mothers trained their princely children. The object of this rigorous system was that the natural disposition of every child, while still sound at the core and untainted, not warped as yet by any vicious tendencies, might at once lay hold with heart and soul on virtuous accomplishments, and whether its bent was towards the army, or the law, or the pursuit of eloquence, might make that its sole aim and its all-absorbing interest.

29. " Nowadays, on the other hand, our children are handed over at their birth to 'some silly little Greek serving-maid, with a male slave, who may be anyone, to help her—quite frequently the most worthless member of the whole establishment,

incompetent for any serious service. It is from the foolish tittle-tattle of such persons that the children receive their earliest impressions, while their minds are still green and unformed; and there is not a soul in the whole house who cares a jot what he says or does in the presence of his baby master. Yes, and the parents themselves make no effort to train their little ones in goodness and self-control; they grow up in an atmosphere of laxity and pertness, in which they come gradually to lose all sense of shame, and all respect both for themselves and for other people. Again, there are the peculiar and characteristic vices of this metropolis of ours, taken on, as it seems to me, almost in the mother's womb—the passion for play actors, and the mania for gladiatorial shows and horse-racing; and when the mind is engrossed in such occupations, what room is left over for higher pursuits? How few are to be found whose home-talk runs to any other subjects than these? What else do we overhear our younger men talking about whenever we enter their lecture-halls? And the teachers are just as bad. With them, too, such topics supply material for gossip with their classes more frequently than any others; for it is not by the strict administration of discipline, or by giving proof of their ability to teach that they get pupils together, but by pushing themselves into notice at morning calls and by the tricks of toadyism.

30. "I pass by the first rudiments of education, though even these are taken too lightly: it is in the reading of authors, and in gaining a knowledge of the past, and in making acquaintance with things and persons and occasions that too little solid work

is done. Recourse is had instead to the so-called rhetoricians. As I mean to speak in the immediate sequel of the period at which this vocation first made its way to Rome, and of the small esteem in which it was held by our ancestors, I must advert to the system which we are told was followed by those orators whose unremitting industry and daily preparation and continuous practice in every department of study are referred to in their own published works. You are of course familiar with Cicero's 'Brutus,' in the concluding portion[1] of which treatise —the first part contains a review of the speakers of former days—he gives an account of his own first beginnings, his gradual progress, and what I may call his evolution as an orator. He tells us how he studied civil law with Q. Mucius, and thoroughly absorbed philosophy in all its departments as a pupil of Philo the Academic and Diodotus the Stoic; and not being satisfied with the teachers who had been accessible to him at Rome, he went to Greece, and travelled also through Asia Minor, in order to acquire a comprehensive training in every variety of knowledge. Hence it comes that in Cicero's works one may detect the fact that he was not lacking in a knowledge of mathematics, of music, of linguistics—in short, of any department of the higher learning. Yes, Cicero was quite at home in the subtleties of dialectic, in the practical lessons of ethical philosophy, in the changes and origins of natural phenomena. Yes, my good friends, that is the fact: it is only from a wealth of learning, and a multitude of accomplishments, and a knowledge that is universal that his marvellous eloquence wells forth

like a mighty stream. The orator's function and activity is not, as is the case with other pursuits, hemmed in all round within narrow boundaries. He only deserves the name who has the ability to speak on any and every topic with grace and distinction of style, in a manner fitted to win conviction, appropriately to the dignity of his subject-matter, suitably to the case in hand, and with resulting gratification to his audience.

31. "This was fully understood by the men of former days. They were well aware that, in order to attain the end in view, the practice of declamation in the schools of rhetoric was not the essential matter —the training merely of tongue and voice in imaginary debates which had no point of contact with real life. No, for them the one thing needful was to stock the mind with those accomplishments which deal with good and evil, virtue and vice, justice and injustice. It is this that forms the subject-matter of oratory. Speaking broadly, in judicial oratory our argument turns upon fair dealing, in the oratory of debate upon advantage, in eulogies upon moral character, though these topics quite frequently overlap. Now it is impossible for any speaker to treat them with fullness, and variety, and elegance, unless he has made a study of human nature, of the meaning of goodness and the wickedness of vice, and unless he has learnt to appreciate the significance of what ranks neither on the side of virtue nor on that of vice. This is the source from which other qualifications also are derived. The man who knows what anger is will be better able either to work on or to mollify the resentment of a judge, just as he who

understands compassion, and the emotions by which it is aroused, will find it easier to move him to pity. If your orator has made himself familiar with these branches by study and practice, whether he has to address himself to a hostile or a prejudiced or a grudging audience, whether his hearers are ill-humoured or apprehensive, he will feel their pulse, and will handle them in every case as their character requires, and will give the right tone to what he has to say, keeping the various implements of his craft lying ready to hand for any and every purpose. There are some with whom a concise, succinct style carries most conviction, one that makes the several lines of proof yield a rapid conclusion: with such it will be an advantage to have paid attention to dialectic. Others are more taken with a smooth and steady flow of speech, drawn from the fountain-head of universal experience: in order to make an impression upon these we shall borrow from the Peripatetics their stock arguments, suited and ready in advance for either side of any discussion. Combativeness will be the contribution of the Academics, sublimity that of Plato, and charm that of Xenophon;[1] nay, there will be nothing amiss in a speaker taking over even some of the excellent aphorisms of Epicurus and Metrodorus,[2] and applying them as the case may demand. It is not a professional philosopher that we are delineating, nor a hanger-on of the Stoics, but the man who, while he ought to drink deeply at certain springs of knowledge, should also wet his lips at them all. That is the reason why the orators of former days made a point of acquiring a knowledge of civil law, while they received a tincture also of

literature, music, and mathematics. In the cases that come one's way, what is essential in most instances, indeed almost invariably, is legal knowledge, but there are often others in which you are expected to be well versed also in the subjects just mentioned.

32. "Do not let anyone argue in reply that it is enough for us to be coached in some straightforward and clearly defined issue in order to meet the case immediately before us. To begin with, the use we make of what belongs to ourselves is quite different from our use of what we take on loan: there is obviously a wide gulf between owning what we give out and borrowing it from others. In the next place, breadth of culture is an ornament that tells of itself even when one is not making a point of it: it comes prominently into view where you would least expect it. This fact is fully appreciated not only by the learned and scholarly portion of the audience, but also by the rank and file. They cheer the speaker from the start, protesting that he has been properly trained, that he has gone through all the points of good oratory, and that he is, in short, an orator in the true sense of the word: and such an one cannot be, as I maintain, and never was any other than he who enters the lists of debate with all the equipment of a man of learning, like a warrior taking the field in full armour. Our clever speakers of today, however, lose sight of this ideal to such an extent that one can detect in their pleadings the shameful and discreditable blemishes even of our everyday speech. They know nothing of statute-law, they have no hold of the decrees of the senate, they go out of their way to show contempt for the law of the constitution, and

as for the pursuit of philosophy and the sages' saws they regard them with downright dismay. Eloquence is by them degraded, like a discrowned queen, to a few commonplaces and cramped conceits. She who in days of yore reigned in the hearts of men as the mistress of all the arts, encircled by a brilliant retinue, is now curtailed and mutilated, shorn of all her state, all her distinction, I had almost said all her freedom, and is learnt like any vulgar handicraft.

"This then I take to be the first and foremost reason why we have degenerated to such an extent from the eloquence of the orators of old. If you want witnesses, what weightier evidence can I produce than Demosthenes among the Greeks, who is said to have been one of Plato's most enthusiastic students? Our own Cicero tells us too—I think in so many words [1]—that anything he accomplished as an orator he owed not to the workshops of the rhetoricians, but to the spacious precincts of the Academy. There are other reasons, important and weighty, which ought in all fairness to be unfolded by you, since I have now done my part and have as usual run up against quite a number of people who will be sure to say, if my words chance to reach their ears, that it is only in order to cry up my own pet vanities that I have been extolling a knowledge of law and philosophy as indispensable to the orator."

33. "Nay," said Maternus, "it seems to me that you have failed so far to fulfil the task you undertook. You have only made a beginning of it, and you have traced out for us what I take to be nothing more than the bare outline of the subject. You have spoken, it is true, of the accomplishments which

formed as a rule the equipment of the orators of bygone days, and you have set forth our indolence and ignorance in strong contrast to their enthusiastic and fruitful application. But I am looking for what is to come next. You have taught me the extent of their knowledge and our abysmal ignorance: what I want also to know about is the methods of training by which it was customary for their young men, when about to enter on professional life, to strengthen and develop their intellectual powers. For the true basis of eloquence is not theoretical knowledge only, but in a far greater degree natural capacity and practical exercise. To this view I am sure you will not demur, and our friends here, to judge by their looks, seem to indicate concurrence."

Both Aper and Secundus expressed agreement with this statement, whereupon Messalla made what may be called a fresh start. "Since I have given," he said, "what seems to be a sufficient account of the first beginnings and the germs of ancient oratory, by setting forth the branches on which the orators of former days were wont to base their training and instruction, I shall now proceed to take up their practical exercises. And yet theory itself involves practice, and it is impossible for anyone to grasp so many diverse and abstruse subjects, unless his theoretical knowledge is re-enforced by practice, his practice by natural ability, and his ability by experience of public speaking. The inference is that there is a certain identity between the method of assimilating what you express and that of expressing what you have assimilated. But if anyone thinks this a dark saying, and wants to separate theory

from practice, he must at least admit that the man whose mind is fully furnished with such theoretical knowledge will come better prepared to the practical exercises which are commonly regarded as the distinctive training of the orator.

34. "Well then, in the good old days the young man who was destined for the oratory of the bar, after receiving the rudiments of a sound training at home, and storing his mind with liberal culture, was taken by his father, or his relations, and placed under the care of some orator who held a leading position at Rome. The youth had to get the habit of following his patron about, of escorting him in public, of supporting him at all his appearances as a speaker, whether in the law courts or on the platform, hearing also his word-combats at first hand, standing by him in his duellings, and learning, as it were, to fight in the fighting-line. It was a method that secured at once for the young students a considerable amount of experience, great self-possession, and a goodly store of sound judgement: for they carried on their studies in the light of open day, and amid the very shock of battle, under conditions in which any stupid or ill-advised statement brings prompt retribution in the shape of the judge's disapproval, taunting criticism from your opponent—yes, and from your own supporters expressions of dissatisfaction. So it was a genuine and unadulterated eloquence that they were initiated in from the very first; and though they attached themselves to a single speaker, yet they got to know all the contemporary members of the bar in a great variety of both civil and criminal cases. Moreover a public meeting gave them the opportunity of

noting marked divergences of taste, so that they could easily detect what commended itself in the case of each individual speaker, and what on the other hand failed to please. In this way they could command, firstly, a teacher, and him the best and choicest of his kind, one who could show forth the true features of eloquence, and not a weak imitation; secondly, opponents and antagonists, who fought with swords, not with wooden foils; and thirdly, an audience always numerous and always different, composed of friendly and unfriendly critics, who would not let any points escape them, whether good or bad. For the oratorical renown that is great and lasting is built up, as you know, quite as much among the opposition benches as on those of one's own side; indeed, its growth in that quarter is sturdier, and takes root more firmly. Yes, under such instructors the young man who is the subject of this discourse, the pupil of real orators, the listener in the forum, the close attendant on the law-courts, trained to his work in the school of other people's efforts, who got to know his law by hearing it cited every day, who became familiar with the faces on the bench, who made the practice of public meetings a subject of constant contemplation, and who had many opportunities of studying the vagaries of the popular taste—such a youth, whether he undertook to appear as prosecutor or for the defence, was competent right away to deal with any kind of case, alone and unaided. Lucius Crassus was only eighteen when he impeached Gaius Carbo, Caesar twenty when he undertook the prosecution of Dolabella, Asinius Pollio twenty-one when he attacked Gaius Cato, and Calvus not much

older when he prosecuted Vatinius. The speeches they delivered on those occasions are read to this day with admiration.

35. "But nowadays our boys are escorted to the schools of the so-called 'professors of rhetoric'—persons who came on the scene just before the time of Cicero but failed to find favour with our forefathers, as is obvious from the fact that the censors Crassus and Domitius ordered them to shut down what Cicero calls their 'school of shamelessness.'[1] They are escorted, as I was saying, to these schools, of which it would be hard to say what is most prejudicial to their intellectual growth, the place itself, or their fellow-scholars, or the studies they pursue. The place has nothing about it that commands respect—no one enters it who is not as ignorant as the rest; there is no profit in the society of the scholars, since they are all either boys or young men who are equally devoid of any feeling of responsibility whether they take the floor or provide an audience; and the exercises in which they engage largely defeat their own objects. You are of course aware that there are two kinds of subject-matter handled by these professors, the deliberative and the disputatious.[2] Now while, as regards the former, it is entrusted to mere boys, as being obviously of less importance and not making such demands on the judgement, the more mature scholars are asked to deal with the latter—but, good heavens! what poor quality is shown in their themes, and how unnaturally they are made up! Then in addition to the subject-matter that is so remote from

of their career. In *controversiae* pupils spoke in the character of litigants (or their advocates) in imaginary law-suits.

real life, there is the bombastic style in which it is presented. And so it comes that themes like these: 'the reward of the king-killer,' or 'the outraged maid's alternatives,' or 'a remedy for the plague,' or 'the incestuous mother,' and all the other topics that are treated every day in the school, but seldom or never in actual practice, are set forth in magniloquent phraseology; but when the speaker comes before a real tribunal . . .[1]

36. ". . . . to have regard to the subject in hand. With him it was an impossibility to give forth any utterance that was trivial or commonplace. Great oratory is like a flame: it needs fuel to feed it, movement to fan it, and it brightens as it burns.

"At Rome too the eloquence of our forefathers owed its development to the same conditions. For although the orators of today have also succeeded in obtaining all the influence that it would be proper to allow them under settled, peaceable, and prosperous political conditions, yet their predecessors in those days of unrest and unrestraint thought they could accomplish more when, in the general ferment and without the strong hand of a single ruler, a speaker's political wisdom was measured by his power of carrying conviction to the unstable populace. This was the source of the constant succession of measures put forward by champions of the people's rights, of the harangues of state officials who almost spent the night on the hustings, of the impeachments of powerful criminals and hereditary feuds between whole families, of schisms among the aristocracy and never-ending struggles between the senate and the commons. All this tore the commonwealth in pieces,

but it provided a sphere for the oratory of those days and heaped on it what one saw were vast rewards. The more influence a man could wield by his powers of speech, the more readily did he attain to high office, the further did he, when in office, outstrip his colleagues in the race for precedence, the more did he gain favour with the great, authority with the senate, and name and fame with the common people. These were the men who had whole nations of foreigners under their protection, several at a time; the men to whom state officials presented their humble duty on the eve of their departure to take up the government of a province, and to whom they paid their respects on their return; the men who, without any effort on their own part, seemed to have praetorships and consulates at their beck and call; the men who even when out of office were in power, seeing that by their advice and authority they could bend both the senate and the people to their will. With them, moreover, it was a conviction that without eloquence it was impossible for anyone either to attain to a position of distinction and prominence in the community, or to maintain it: and no wonder they cherished this conviction, when they were called on to appear in public even when they would rather not, when it was not enough to move a brief resolution in the senate, unless one made good one's opinion in an able speech, when persons who had in some way or other incurred odium, or else were definitely charged with some offence, had to put in an appearance in person, when, moreover, evidence in criminal trials had to be given not indirectly or by affidavit, but personally and by word of mouth. So

it was that eloquence not only led to great rewards, but was also a sheer necessity; and just as it was considered great and glorious to have the reputation of being a good speaker, so, on the other hand, it was accounted discreditable to be inarticulate and incapable of utterance.

37. "Thus it was a sense of shame quite as much as material reward that gave them an incentive. They wanted to be ranked with patrons rather than poor dependents; they could not bear to let inherited connections pass into the hands of strangers; and they had to avoid the reputation for apathy and incompetence that would either keep them from obtaining office or make their official careers a failure. I wonder if you have seen the ancient records which are still extant in the libraries of collectors, and which are even now being compiled by Mucianus :[1] they have already been arranged and edited in eleven volumes, I think, of Proceedings and five of Letters. They make it clear that Gnaeus Pompeius and Marcus Crassus[2] rose to power not only as warriors and men of might, but also by their talent for oratory; that the Lentuli and the Metelli and the Luculli and the Curios and all the great company of our nobles devoted great care and attention to these pursuits; and that in their day no one attained to great influence without some gift of eloquence.

"There was a further advantage in the high rank of the persons who were brought to trial and the importance of the interests involved, factors which are also in a great degree conducive to eloquence. For it makes a good deal of difference whether you

are briefed to speak about a case of theft, or a rule of procedure, and the provisional order of a magistrate, or about electioneering practices, the robbery of a province, and the murder of fellow-citizens. It is better, of course, that such horrors should not occur at all, and we must regard that as the most enviable political condition in which we are not liable to anything of the kind. Yet when these things did happen, they furnished the orators of the day with ample material. Hand in hand with the importance of the theme goes the growing ability to cope with it, and it is a sheer impossibility for anyone to produce a great and glorious oration unless he has found a theme to correspond. It is not, I take it, the speeches which he composed in the action he brought against his guardians that give Demosthenes his name and fame, nor does Cicero rest his claims to greatness as an orator on his defence of Publius Quintius or Licinius Archias.[1] No, it was a Catiline, a Milo, a Verres, an Antonius [2] that made his reputation for him. I do not mean that it was worth the country's while to produce bad citizens, just in order that our orators might have an ample supply of material; but let us bear in mind the point at issue, as I keep urging you to do, realising that our discourse is dealing with an art which comes to the front more readily in times of trouble and unrest. We all know that the blessings of peace bring more profit and greater happiness than the horrors of war; yet war produces a larger number of good fighters than peace. It is the same with eloquence. The oftener it takes its stand in the lists, the more numerous the strokes it gives and receives, the more powerful

the opponents and the more keenly contested the issues it deliberately selects, in like proportion does eloquence carry its head higher and more erect before the eyes of men, deriving ever greater lustre from the very hazards it encounters. For men are naturally prone, while courting security for themselves, to admire whatever has an element of risk.

38. "I pass on to the organisation and procedure of the old law-courts. It may nowadays have become more practical, but all the same the forum as it then was provided a better training-ground for oratory. There was no obligation on any speaker to complete his pleading within an hour or two at the most; adjournments were always in order; as regards a time-limit, each man was a law to himself; and no attempt was made to define either how many days the case was to take or how many counsel were to be employed in it. It was Gnaeus Pompeius who, in his third consulship,[1] first introduced limitations in regard to these matters. He may be said to have curbed eloquence with bit and bridle, without however cancelling the provision that everything should be done in court, according to law, and before a praetor. The best proof you can have of the greater importance of the cases dealt with by the praetors in former days is the fact that actions before the centumviral court, which are now considered to outrank all others, used to be so much overshadowed by the prestige of other tribunals that there is not a single speech, delivered before that court, that is read today, either by Cicero, or by Caesar, or by Brutus, or by Caelius, or by Calvus, or in fact by any orator of rank. The only exceptions are the speeches of

Asinius Pollio entitled 'For Urbinia's Heirs,' and yet these are just the ones which he delivered well on in the middle of the reign of Augustus, when in consequence of the long period of peace, and the unbroken spell of inactivity on the part of the commons and of peaceableness on the part of the senate, by reason also of the working of the great imperial system, a hush had fallen upon eloquence, as indeed it had upon the world at large.

39. "My next point will perhaps strike you as trivial and ridiculous, but I shall make it, even if only to excite your ridicule. Take those gowns into which we squeeze ourselves when we chat with the court, a costume that shackles movement, do we ever reflect how largely responsible they are for the orator's loss of dignity? Or think of the recitation-halls and record-offices in which pretty well most cases are nowadays despatched, have they not also greatly contributed to the emasculation of eloquence? Why, just as with blood-horses it takes a roomy track to show their mettle, so orators need a spacious field in which to expatiate without let or hindrance, if their eloquence is not to lose all its strength and pith. Moreover, painstaking preparation and the anxious effort for stylistic finish are found after all to do more harm than good. The judge often asks when you are going to come to the point, and you are bound to make a start as soon as he puts the question. Just as often he imposes silence in the middle of proofs or evidence. All the time the speaker has only two or three for an audience, and the hearing goes forward in what is a scene of desolation. But your public speaker can't get along without 'hear, hear,'

and the clapping of hands. He must have what I may call his stage. This the orators of former times could command day after day, when the forum was packed by an audience at the same time numerous and distinguished, when persons who had to face the hazard of a public trial could depend on being supported by shoals of clients and fellow-tribesmen, and by deputations also from the country towns; half Italy, in fact, was there to back them. These were the days when the people of Rome felt that in quite a number of cases they had a personal stake in the verdict. We know on good authority that both the impeachment and the defence of a Cornelius, a Scaurus, a Milo, a Bestia, a Vatinius [1] brought the whole community together *en masse*: so that it would have been impossible for even the most frigid of speakers not to be enkindled and set on fire by the mere clash of partisan enthusiasm. That is why the quality of the published orations that have come down to us is so high that it is by these more than by any others that the speakers who appeared on either side actually take rank.

40. "Think again of the incessant public meetings, of the privilege so freely accorded of inveighing against persons of position and influence—yes, and of the glory you gained by being at daggers drawn with them, in the days when so many clever speakers could not let even a Scipio alone, or a Sulla, or a Pompeius, and when, taking a leaf out of the book of stage-players, they made public meetings also the opportunity of launching characteristically spiteful tirades against the leading men of the state: how all this must have inflamed

the able debater and added fuel to the fire of his eloquence!

"The art which is the subject of our discourse is not a quiet and peaceable art, or one that finds satisfaction in moral worth and good behaviour: no, really great and famous oratory is a foster-child of licence, which foolish men called liberty, an associate of sedition, a goad for the unbridled populace. It owes no allegiance to any. Devoid of discipline, it is insulting, off-hand, and overbearing. It is a plant that does not grow under a well-regulated constitution. Does history contain a single instance of any orator at Sparta, or in Crete, two states whose political system and legislation were more stringent than any other on record? It is equally true to say that in Macedonia and in Persia eloquence was unknown, as indeed it was in all states that were content to live under a settled government. Rhodes has had some orators, Athens a great many: in both communities all power was in the hands of the populace —that is to say, the untutored democracy, in fact the mob. Likewise at Rome, so long as the constitution was unsettled, so long as the country kept wearing itself out with factions and dissensions and disagreements, so long as there was no peace in the forum, no harmony in the senate, no restraint in the courts of law, no respect for authority, no sense of propriety on the part of the officers of state, the growth of eloquence was doubtless sturdier, just as untilled soil produces certain vegetation in greater luxuriance. But the benefit derived from the eloquence of the Gracchi did not make up for what the country suffered from their laws, and too dearly did

Cicero pay by the death he died for his renown in oratory.

41. "In the same way what little our orators have left them of the old forensic activities goes to show that our civil condition is still far from being ideally perfect. Does anyone ever call us lawyers to his aid unless he is either a criminal or in distress? Does any country town ever ask for our protection except under pressure either from an aggressive neighbour or from internal strife? Are we ever retained for a province except where robbery and oppression have been at work? Yet surely it were better to have no grievances than to need to seek redress. If a community could be found in which nobody ever did anything wrong, orators would be just as superfluous among saints as are doctors among those that need no physician. For just as the healing art is very little in demand and makes very little progress in countries where people enjoy good health and strong constitutions, so oratory has less prestige and smaller consideration where people are well behaved and ready to obey their rulers. What is the use of long arguments in the senate, when good citizens agree so quickly? What is the use of one harangue after another on public platforms, when it is not the ignorant multitude that decides a political issue, but a monarch who is the incarnation of wisdom? What is the use of taking a prosecution on one's own shoulders when misdeeds are so few and so trivial, or of making oneself unpopular by a defence of inordinate length, when the defendant can count on a gracious judge meeting him halfway? Believe me, my friends, you who have all the

eloquence that the times require: if you had lived in bygone days, or if the orators who rouse our admiration had lived today—if some deity, I say, had suddenly made you change places in your lives and epochs, you would have attained to their brilliant reputation for eloquence just as surely as they would show your restraint and self-control. As things are, since it is impossible for anybody to enjoy at one and the same time great renown and great repose, let everyone make the most of the blessings his own times afford without disparaging any other age."

42. When Maternus had finished speaking, "There were some points," Messalla said, "to which I should like to take exception, and others which, I think, might call for fuller treatment. But the hour grows late."

"Some other time," Maternus replied, "we shall take the matter up again, whenever you please. We can then discuss again anything in my argument that may have struck you as needing further elucidation."

With that he rose from his seat and put his arms round Aper, saying, "We shall both denounce you—I to the poets and Messalla to the lovers of antiquity."

"And I," said Aper, "shall denounce both of you to the teachers of rhetoric and the professors."

They beamed on each other, and we went our ways.